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APPENDIX VIII

BULGARIANS AND SOUTHERN RURAL WHITES IN CONTRAST*

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The Bulgaria of which I speak is three-fourths rural, definitely peasant. The group of Southern whites to which I limit myself in this analogy is made up of the small farmer, whether he be owner, tenant, sharecropper, hillbilly, or cracker.[1] My discussion, centering as it does upon what the political columnists so fondly and not inaccurately term the "little people" of each region, therefore excludes the comparatively well-to-do urban industrial and professional groups of both Bulgaria and the South. In comparing rural Bulgaria and the rural South I was reminded of a question which has been often raised recently: Are we to have an American peasant class?[2] While I cannot answer this question to my own satisfaction I recognize its implications. If we are to have a peasant class there is much we can learn from the agricultural sections of Europe where a stable, organized life has gone on for hundreds of years through the intensive use of all available natural resources in the midst of turbulent political changes, plagues, and famines.

Just as visitors in writing of the South misuse the word "poor white"[3] so we in considering the European scene often misuse the word "peasant," giving it a connotation of reproach as though a peasant were a serf.[4] The

* Read before the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in Knoxville, Tennessee, April 5, 1940. Appeared as an article in *Social Forces*, XIX, No. 1, October, 1940. Reprinted by permission.

[1] "The South today, especially the Southeast, is essentially a land of hillbillies and other ruralites, whose chief contact with the commerce and culture of the world is through hick towns (p. 8).

"The South is a land of farms and farmers." . . . To appraise the South is to appraise farmers, whether for the art of living or for the lack of a living" (pp. 10-11). H. C. Nixon, *Forty Acres and Steel Mules* (Chapel Hill, 1938).

[2] " . . . Such are the beginnings of peasantry in the New World—The Collapse of the Black Belt plantation system is a preface to American peasantry." A. F. Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill, 1936), p. 4.

[3] W. T. Couch, Editor, *Culture in the South* (Chapel Hill, 1934). See chapt. 20, The Tradition of "Poor Whites," by A. N. J. Den Hollander. M. R. Mell, "Poor Whites of the South," *Social Forces*, December, 1938, pp. 153-167.

[4] " . . . With this transformation (that is, the peasant becoming an entrepreneur) have come changes in the connotation of the word 'peasant.' He is no longer a rustic of inferior status too ignorant and dull to take advantage of commercial opportunities;

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Bulgarian peasants whom I knew intimately for six years are independent farmers who dwell in their own homes, subsist on their own land[5] and form a folk, in the anthropological sense.

Bulgaria, a Balkan country the size of Ohio with a population of six million, was for five hundred years under Turkish rule, becoming independent in 1878 as a result of a Russo-Turkish War. Bulgaria's reconstruction period therefore covers approximately the same time as ours.[6] The few large landowners in Bulgaria fled to Turkey after the Liberation. This means that the Bulgarian farmers own their land; tenancy is very uncommon; the employment of farm laborers even less common.[7] As the farm population has increased, the already small holdings have had to be further divided, until now the average farm totals 15 acres scattered in 17 strips around the picturesque villages in which the people live.[8] The heart of Bulgarian peasant economy is the agricultural village[9]; the heart of life in the village is the home and the family system. Each farm of 17 acres must support, in addition to all dependents, four or five adults of working age. The fact that women and children

it is increasingly recognized that the really important characteristics peculiar to the peasant are his sentiments and attitudes, the intense attachment to his native soil and family tradition, which, even in the economic sphere, take precedence over the desire for individual advancement and gain. This peasant ethos is common throughout continental Europe." *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* Article on Peasantry by C. von Dietze.

[5] Peasantry, of course, is not synonymous with farm ownership everywhere in Europe, but the governments there (notably in Ireland and Denmark) recognize the importance of a landed peasantry as shown by recent attempts to lessen tenancy. See *Farm Tenancy, Report of President's Committee,* 1937, Section III, Some Tenure Programs of other Nations.

[6] The crises through which Bulgaria has passed have much in common with those of the South as listed in H. W. Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States* (Chapel Hill, 1936), pp. 13-14. Nikola Stanev, *Istoria Na Nova Bulgaria, 1878-1928* (History of the New Bulgaria), Sofia, 1929.

[7] Ian C. Mollov and T. E. Bakurdjiev, *Organizatsionnata Struktura Na Zemedelskoto Stopanstvo Vv Sofiska Okolia* (The Organizational Structure of the Farms in the County of Sofia), Sofia, 1931, pp. 6-7. (95.3 per cent of farmers work their own land, 4.7 per cent rent their land; only 3.2 per cent employ hired labor.)

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 5. For the country as a whole see the *Statesman's Year Book, 1939:* "According to the census of 1934, eighty per cent of the active population were engaged in agriculture, most of them being small proprietors holding from *one to six acres.*" This is understood more clearly when it is remembered that only thirty-nine per cent of the total area is arable and that this is divided into 750,613 farms. (*The New International Yearbook, 1938,* article on Bulgaria.)

[9] H. C. Nixon, *op. cit.* "Farm ownership or a sounder lease policy is not enough to enable Southern hillbillies to live in decency. It is essential to provide by public effort for social and economic co-operation among small farmers, to make possible a better system of farm villages" p. 61.

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work outdoors with the men means an abundant labor supply but also requires close co-operation, planning, and division of labor.[10]

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Peasant economy is based on a self-subsistence principle in which a satisfactory balance between plant and animal life is maintained.[11] Since cash income is low the plane of living is low.[12] That is, the peasant cannot buy from the outside world much in the way of clothing, machinery, conveniences, or recreation. On the other hand, he does eat well according to his own standards. Furthermore, he maintains his self-respect. There is security in land which nothing else affords unless it be a family large enough to work the land one owns. No matter how much one discounts that sort of economy, history has shown it to be the most enduring man has yet devised.

The picture is different in the South.[13] Although our farms average 71 acres they are operated by tenants in 54 per cent of the cases,[14] usually on a cash crop basis.[15] Only in the Appalachian-Ozark area, which by the way is most like the Bulgarian, do we find subsistence-farming as the prevailing principle.[16] There, however, it is blighted by isolation and lacks the co-operative features found in most agricultural villages: a swineherd caring during the day for all pigs in the village, communal pastures, or neighborhood corn-hoeing groups. To be sure, there is mutual aid and co-operation in the highlands but these tend to be confined to periods of crisis rather than to the performance of ordinary daily tasks.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 14: "In fact, excessive ruralism has caused an unusual amount of labor to fall to the lot of women in this region of chivalry [the South]."

[11] Oxen, water-buffalo and horses, in the order of importance, are the work animals in Bulgaria. The government is trying to persuade peasants to replace oxen with dual-purpose cows as an economy move.

[12] Ian C. Mollov and H. K. Kondov, *Dohodnostuta Na 57 Zemedelski Stopanstva Vv Bulgaria* (1932-33). (The Incomes of 57 Bulgarian Farms for 1932-33.) This study gives some indication of the level of living possible.

[13] Standards of living are low in the South. See C. C. Taylor, H. W. Wheeler, E. L. Kirkpatrick, *Disadvantaged Classes in American Agriculture*, Washington, 1938. Good bibliographies on pp. 8 and 9; description of the Old South, pp. 115-119.

[14] *Report of the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy, 1937*, p. 35. Figures cited here are for sixteen South Atlantic and South Central States and the District of Columbia. The percentage would be even higher for Southeastern States alone.

[15] Odum, *op. cit.*, p. 391. On pages 489-491 Odum quotes Rupert B. Vance: "Until recently in this country no critical theory of tenancy has been developed which takes into consideration the fact that while the United States is drifting into tenancy, certain European countries with semi-feudal backgrounds, notably Denmark, Ireland, and France, have made the transitions to peasant proprietorship."

[16] Couch, *op. cit.*, p. 25. "This section [Appalachian-Ozark] is responsible for the fact that the South has a larger number of practically self-sufficing farms than any other important section in the United States." C. P. Loomis and L. S. Dodson, *Standards of Living in Four Southern Appalachian Mountain Counties*, Washington, 1938.

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The failure of the Southern whites to co-operate for economic ends is tragic. A Southern adaptation of co-operative patterns found successful elsewhere, if generally accepted, would afford a fuller, richer existence for the thousands of families which go their individual, poverty-stricken ways in the mistaken belief that co-operation is incompatible with independence. European peasants are renowned for their independence as well as for their co-operation.[17]

The Southern population is mobile, one out of every three Southern tenant families moving yearly.[18] The Bulgarian population is permanent, as shown in the study I made of the farmers of one Bulgarian village where 91.4 per cent of the male family heads and 96.3 per cent of their fathers had been born in the same village.[19] We would expect this contrast because of the differences in the economic system.

But there is an interesting similarity between Bulgarians and the Southeast in those population characteristics which are dependent upon biological factors. The Southeast is often called the "nursery of the Nation" with a natural increase of 9.5 (birth rate 21.7, death rate 12.2),[20] whereas Bulgaria is one of the leaders of Europe in this respect with a natural increase of 10.5 (birth rate 23.9, death rate 13.4).[21]

Homogeneity is characteristic of Bulgarian people as it is of the Southern white, not only in respect to similarity of racial strain but in respect to religion as well. Most Bulgarians are adherents of the Eastern Orthodox Church; most Southern whites are Protestants.[22]

The Southern whites share the region with a numerous minority; Bulgaria has no significant minority problem, for the Turks who comprised 11 per cent

[17] This co-operation can be expressed on an informal basis as well as through a formal organization. Carl C. Taylor, Head of the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare, in addressing the American Association of School Administrators in February, 1940, said: "Self-help is no new doctrine in rural areas, and the best approach to the improvement of rural life on all fronts is to utilize the capacities for self-sufficiency and to expand self-help from an individual to a community and co-operative basis. To do otherwise is so completely to urbanize farming and farm life as to lose nationally the unique contributions which country life always has made and always should make to our civilization."

[18] *Report on Economic Conditions of the South,* National Emergency Council, 1938, p. 47.

[19] The Sociology of a Bulgarian Shopski Village, doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1938.

[20] Odum, *op. cit.,* p. 492 (evidently includes both Negro and white rates).

[21] *The New International Yearbook, 1938, article on Bulgaria.* Note the decline since 1926 when the natural increase was 20.1 (birth rate 37, death rate 17) D. Kostov, *Geografia Na Bulgaria i Susednite i Durzhavi* (Geography of Bulgaria and Neighboring States), Plovdiv, 1928.

[22] Odum, *op. cit.,* p. 15.

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565 of the population in 1926 have been returning to Turkey at a greatly accelerated pace.

● 105 There are striking anthropological contrasts between the Bulgarian peasant and the Southern white. The most marked of these is the peasant's close identification with a folk culture which is characterized by a consciousness of kind, established patterns of habit and thought, artifacts identified with that culture alone, and a strong exercise of social control. There is also uniformity of dress, agricultural method, and social values.

Among the Southern whites the Appalachian-Ozark area alone possesses the characteristics of a folk, for its people are closely knit together, have mountain handicrafts of which they are proud,[33] and, although differing in economic status, tend to conform to cultural patterns handed from the past. On the contrary, the tenant farmer may have his share of superstitions, folk remedies, and traditional attitudes, but he lacks "consciousness of kind" which would identify him with a folk culture.[34]

The four social institutions which I wish to mention briefly but which I shall not compare in detail are the family, education, religion, and government.[35]

596 105 The Bulgarian family is patriarchal, children are valued as economic assets; there is a strong kinship feeling even unto the third and fourth generation. Marriage is still an arrangement between two families under the sole control of the church. Family disorganization in the form of desertion or divorce is practically unknown; illegitimacy rare.

871 105 There is compulsory education to the fourteenth year in Bulgaria. However, the law is seldom invoked because the parents have recognized the economic value of education. That is why Bulgaria is the most literate country in the Balkans, a testimony to the high value the peasants place upon education and the rigid social control at work in the compact villages. If some

[33] W. T. Couch, *op. cit.*, chapter 15—The Handicrafts by Allen H. Eaten; chapter 19—Appalachian America by J. Wotley Hatcher; chapter 26—Folk and Folklore by B. A. Botkin.

[34] The folk culture is quite different from a regional or Southern culture such as Odum describes at length in his Chapter IX in *Southern Regions* on Institutions and Folkways. The Bulgarian peasant is primarily identified with the village culture and secondarily with newer national culture in process of development. The Southern white is identified with a regional culture but not with a folk culture.

[35] Because of space limitations I omitted a section dealing with Psychological Comparisons. This would have compared the race prejudice and regional "inferiority complex" of the Southerner with the nationalism and sensitiveness to criticism of the Bulgarian. Bulgaria, defeated in the World War, has its Lost Cause as does the South. Bulgarians, like Southerners, have gained the reputation for conservatism and hospitality. On the other hand, industry is more a Bulgarian than a Southern trait.

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poorer peasant wanted to keep his children home from school he would have to face the withering scorn of his neighbors. I cannot help contrasting this situation with that found in the South where truancy is a major educational problem arising from the mobility of the population, the distance between home and school, and the low place afforded education in the scale of social values.

Most young Bulgarian men after their eighteenth year are called upon to serve their country as *trudovatsi* (members of the Labor Corps) or as soldiers. The time they spend in the barracks not only widens their social contacts and broadens their outlook but also educates them in the formal sense to the extent that they take advantage of courses offered. In America the Civilians' Conservation Corps is roughly analogous, differing in that it is on a voluntary basis, pays the youth for work done, and is restricted to those young men from families of a low economic level.

The Bulgarian peasant has a dualistic view of the universe. First, there are the forces of good which must be propitiated. The priest is God's intermediary and can intervene with him in the event of a drought, serious illness in the family, or sterility in the wife. The priest christens the baby and sanctifies the marriage tie. In the event of death he performs the liturgy to insure the soul's passage into a heaven thought of in very realistic but not enthusiastic terms.

There are also the forces of evil whom it pays well to placate. A few old women in every village are the "priestesses of superstition" whose incantations work wonders and drive off the Evil Eye. Peasants do not discuss this white magic when the priest is around, so complete is the dichotomy between the Good and the Bad. Religion as represented by the church consists of form and ceremony rather than a challenge to daily living. Furthermore, the Bulgarian peasant derives little emotional release from an "other worldly" rapture indulged in on Sundays. He is too secure, too stolid, too practical for that. On the contrary, the insecurity of the Southern white is attested to by the increasing numbers adhering to the excitable Pentecostal type of religious expression.[24]

We hear much in the South today about suffrage reforms, abolition of the poll tax, government paternalism, and the failure of democratic processes. Since the same problems are being faced in Bulgaria a comparison may prove helpful.

Fifty years ago the villages were governed by elders, the influential heads of the larger families. After Bulgaria's Liberation from Turkey in 1878 the

[24] John B. Holt, Religious Secession and Class in the Southeast. A paper read before the Section on Sociology of Religion, annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, 1939.

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right to vote was gradually extended to the village men before these men had had the advantages of an adequate school system. They like ignorant people the world around were more influenced by personalities than by principles, thus becoming an easy prey to politicians who played upon their emotions, catered to their prejudices, and took advantage of their credulity. But vote they must or be fined approximately five dollars for staying away from the polls.

With an electorate so inexperienced in the democratic tradition, great confusion arose. For instance, there were sixteen political parties in a nation of six million, making it impossible for any party to get a clear majority. The only way government could go on was by a bloc composed of several parties, but even this was inefficient. Therefore in 1934 Bulgaria had a New Deal, a *coup d' etat* headed by some military men who initiated numerous agrarian reforms. No longer did the peasants vote and thereby control government policies; instead they were told what to do. Gradually those who had engineered this *coup d' etat* were displaced from power by the King, a dictatorship was averted, and two years ago[a] a semblance of democracy was again restored when the vote was given back to peasant men and mothers. Instead of allowing party affiliations the government organized the electorate on the basis of occupation, following the corporation system in Italy where parliamentary members represent an economic rather than a geographical constituency.

Watching the failure of democracy in Bulgaria has made me gravely concerned about the future of democracy in the South. I am strongly in favor of giving our disenfranchised groups the right to vote, but so many advocates of suffrage reform seem to forget the necessity of training these groups in the meaning and proper use of the ballot. Democracy is not a quantitative process which is better guaranteed by increasing the number of voters; it is a qualitative process which requires increasing understanding of the obligations of citizenship as well as extension of the franchise. Ignorant voters pave the way for demagoguery[b]; demagoguery creates a situation ripe for the dictator; dictatorships doom democracies.

Since 1934 the Bulgarian political philosophers have been floundering between democratic and dictatorial procedures but the peasant has been handed over to a new type of paternalism which has its analogy in the South. The central government in Sofia is represented in the village by a professional man, usually a lawyer, as mayor. This mayor acts as local justice of the peace; he takes advantage of every public occasion to tell the peasants in a fatherly way what they ought to do and think about matters of national importance.

[a] Parliamentary elections were held on the four Sundays of March, 1938 (*The New International Year-Book, 1938, Bulgaria*).

[b] A. F. Raper, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-169.

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The mayor has some influence with the Debt Commissions coming from government banks to relieve the debt burdens of the farmers, he distributes whatever relief is available for needy families, and he has a prominent part in the administration of the school, public health, and village improvements. Because of this he is gradually displacing the priest as the most important personality in the village. In other words, the paternalism of the church is now being supplanted by that of the state.

We find a similar situation in the South where white farmers are beginning to depend less upon landlords, banks, and advancing merchants, and more upon the grants from governmental units, whether in the form of relief or credit facilities. Plantation or small-town paternalism is yielding to governmental paternalism.

The Bulgarian peasant is not a joiner. He does not use the organizational approach in attacking a problem but prefers to work through informal groups. There are two chief reasons why he avoids membership in the numerous formal groups seeking the villagers' support: first, he is penurious and will pay no membership fee unless he sees some prospect of personal advantage; secondly, he does not understand the purpose or program of the organizations, since most of them originate in the cities and are promoted by the *intelligentsia*. There are no church organizations claiming his support as in the case in most Southern neighborhoods. Living in a village as he does the peasant can visit with friends and neighbors without the necessity of having an organization to provide a rallying place.

The Southern white thinks vertically; the Bulgarian peasant horizontally —a difference in mental pattern which accounts for the difference in social process.

By "thinking vertically" I mean that traditionally the Southern white is dominated by the attraction of the American ladder of opportunity, although for him it has often proved mythical.[20] That is, success in life is determined by the extent to which one approximates the plane of living enjoyed by those of a higher economic level. Climbing means competition rather than co-operation.[20] Frustration seems to be displacing the traditional, optimistic view among many of the Southern whites. They look up the ladder, but say, "What's the use of starting the climb!" As individuals they are pitted against forces over which they have no control.[21]

[20] H. C. Nixon, *op. cit.*, p. 9. Shows the traditional nature of this mind-set in speaking of the Old South: "Nonslaveowners expected to become small slaveowners, and small slaveowners expected to become large ones." The mythical aspect is shown nowadays by the phrase "once a sharecropper, always a sharecropper."

[20] Odum, *op. cit.*, pp. 585-586, emphasizes the need for county and/or community co-operation.

[21] Perhaps Populism in the late 19th century came as near creating a consciousness of kind among the rural whites as anything else has ever done.

The Bulgarian case seems particularly apropos for such a study. Unlike Czarist Russia or the countries of Asia, pre-Communist Bulgaria had developed a relatively free and advanced society. Within the framework of a most liberal and democratic constitution, of a social structure without any noticeable class differences and of a predominantly agricultural economy based on independent small landholdings, Bulgaria had produced a social legislation among the most progressive of our time. Native intelligentsia and labor alike represented only about 20 per cent of the population and were nothing more than recent offspring of the nation's backbone—the peasantry—so that no logical conflict of interests had a chance to develop in Bulgaria. Labor, in particular, had attained, as early as the twenties, the status of free labor with all necessary requisites, such as freedom of professional organization, free collective bargaining and impartial settlement of labor disputes, the right to strike, freedom of choosing and changing job, and a firm legal protection, including social security. In fact, by 1924, Bulgaria had incorporated into her domestic legislation all recommendations of the International Labor Office of the League of Nations.[3]

In such a harmonious environment, Communism could not and did not have any chance of success. Still, Communist attempts to artificially create a "social problem" and exploit it for their own purposes go way back to the turn of the century, when, in 1903, a small group of Lenin's followers split from the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party and formed a radical-revolutionary nucleus, known later

[3] For detailed background information and source material, see author's study *Trade Unions and Labor Legislation in Bulgaria (1878-1953)* (New York: Mid-European Studies Center, 1953).